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Chapter

'Programmed to Serve'

Urban Planning and Elite Interests in Zimbabwe

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Abstract

Based on an analysis of documents and interviews, the chapter recasts the role of planning vis-à-vis elite interests in urban Zimbabwe. It deploys three cases to interrogate the (ab)use of planning by the elite. Cautioning against hasty judgements of impropriety and vice, the chapter argues for the recognition of planning systems as being programmed to serve elite interests. This is seen as an important step towards a more realistic interpretation of how cities are governed in Africa. The chapter maintains that productive lines of enquiry are those that focus on whether and how the pro-elite 'programme' can be violated. The chapter concludes by arguing that only through reflective practice and the resultant insurgency can the pro-elite 'programme' be challenged.

1. Introduction

A controversial 2010 report by the Special Investigations Committee on land sales, leases and exchanges in Harare opens with this sensational statement:

There is rampant corruption in all departments of Council. The Department of Urban Planning Services ... seems to be the worst affected by this scourge. There is evidence to suggest that all this was brought about by the so-called Strategic Turnaround Programme. This could have been a ploy by some unscrupulous strategists whose appetite for self-enrichment drove them to come out with a plan to loot council land. Systems that are void of accountability now form the basis of this turnaround project (City of Harare, 2010, p. 3).

This is a damning indictment on urban planners and planning. It presents strong accusations of what a local government expert termed 'naked corruption of the most virulent kind'

(Interview 1).¹ Unsurprisingly, the report, set off a huge controversy in Zimbabwe's polarised socio-political terrain. The ruling ZANU-PF party was accused of brutal forms of primitive accumulation (Moore, 2012). The incarceration by the police of the authors of the report at the instigation of a businessman implicated in the scandal fuelled speculation that the country's elite had something to hide.

Focusing on planning, this chapter reframes these reputed goings-on in the relationship between an avowedly neutral technocracy and elite interests in urban Zimbabwe. It examines three areas in which planning has been implicated: promoting elitist visions of the city, facilitating primitive accumulation, and defending elite interests. The chapter evaluates the (ab)use of planning to serve elite interest in each of the cases. While acknowledging the complicity of planning, the chapter argues that the real issue is not servility, corruption or criminality. It contends that modernist bureaucracies are built to be handmaidens of elite interests. The institutional, statutory and regulatory framework is by no means neutral. Accordingly, by its obsession with artificial order, planning inevitably favours the authors and sponsors of that order.

The chapter argues for the recognition of the reality that planning systems are programmed to serve the elite. It contends that without reflection in practice within the profession, it is impossible to work against the built-in biases in, and brazen abuses of, planning. After the introduction, there is a brief overview of the analytical framework, focusing on theorisations of the elite and planning's quest for value-free instrumental rationality. This is followed by an examination of spatial planning vis-à-vis the elite. The chapter then moves on to a discussion of three cases where planning is seen as serving elite interests. It concludes with a critical recasting of the obsequiousness of planning to elite interests.

2. Framework for Analysis

The hierarchical organisation of social institutions allows a minority to monopolise power (Mosca, 1939:50). As various strands of elite theory show, the elite are made up of two groups: governing and non-governing elites (Pareto 1935; Dunleavy and O'Leary, 1987). These in turn can be divided into political, military, economic and social elites (Mills, 1956; Acemoglu and Robinson, 2012). An aspect that dominates definitions of the elite is the question of advantage and privilege in the sector that is under consideration, be it economic, political or social (Mills, 1956). Always in the minority, elites perform key political functions, monopolise power and enjoy the privileges of power (Mosca, 1939, p. 50). In their various fields, elites invariably belong to a group of people considered to be the 'best', thanks to

¹ Quoting and citing the report and interviews does not mean the author endorses the content, viewpoints and allegations in these sources. There is no intention on the part of the author to be defamatory.

their power, talent, or wealth. As a class they enjoy superior status be it social, economic, political or intellectual.

In this chapter elites refer to the small group of rich, powerful and influential people who dominate society. The term also denotes the very small group of leaders occupying formal positions of authority or power in public and private institutions at various spatial levels. Thanks to their privileged position, the elite are embroiled in making or influencing major decisions in the economic, political, social and administrative spheres (DLP, 2011). Machiavelli (1997, p. 67) famously divided rulers into two groups: foxes and lions. As noted by Alexander (1994), the qualities he ascribes to these two classes closely resemble those typical of Pareto's Class I and Class II residue types (Pareto, 1935). People with strong Class I residues are the 'foxes'. They tend to be manipulative, innovative, calculating, imaginative and unscrupulous. In this category are politicians, entrepreneurs and technocrats such as planners. Machiavelli's 'lions' correspond to Pareto's Class II residues. The conservative lions place 'much more value on traits such as good character and devotion to duty than on sheer wits' making them 'the defenders of tradition, the guardians of religious dogma, and the protectors of national honour' (Alexander, 1994, p. 12). The lions among which conservative residues of Class II preponderate, are capable of decisive and forceful action.

It is the balance between the foxes and lions that determines the overall traits and longevity of the ruling elite. Notably, Pareto warns that elites who embrace humanitarianism are in danger of being supplanted by another elite. According to Pareto, philanthropy, tolerance and related tendencies are precursors to full-blown decadence. He warns, 'Any elite which is not prepared to join in battle to defend its position is in full decadence, and all that is left to it is to give way to another elite having the virile qualities it lacks' (cited in Bar-On, 2007, p. 187). It is, at least in part, an awareness of this constantly lurking danger that explains the behaviour and tenacity of Zimbabwe's power elite.

The analysis would not be complete without the complicity of bureaucrats, including planners. These technical non-governing elite are an integral part of the designs of the power and economic elite, constantly advancing and defending their interests (Piccolo, 2008). Most of them are devoted to a kind of value-free neutrality and objectivity rooted in positivism. In fragmented and polarised societies, technical value-free instrumental rationalism such as that displayed by professional urban planners provides fertile breeding ground for the advancement and perpetuation of dominant interests (see Klosterman, 1978; Kamete, 2009a; Healey, 2006; Webber, 1983). Blinded to what are considered to be 'irrational' issues relating to values, and restricted to the realm of devising efficient means to pre-set goals that are made elsewhere by the elite who monopolise policymaking (see Friedmann, 1987; Brubaker, 1984; Weber, 1978), technocrats provide the perfect, if unwitting, allies for the governing elite.

In its workings, planning instantiates power relations that reflect urban politics and power relations at the local and national levels. Since planning is no more than a 'social [event] embedded within society' (Dear and Scott 1981, p. 4), Marxist critiques dismiss it as nothing more than an arm of a repressive state (Foglesong 1986). Being a state-directed practice, planning derives its legitimacy and authority from the governing elites. In the 1980s, dissatisfaction with what was then the planning paradigm—the positivist rational process model—spawned rival planning theories and practices (Allmendinger, 2009). This was aided by a strong Marxist critique of planning. This 'dissenting planning theory' (Low 1991) attacked, among other things, the notion of a unitary public interest and highlighted the commanding role of capital operating through the state.

In southern African in general, and in Zimbabwe in particular, planning still claims to promote this public interest (see Wekwete 1988; Kamete 2012). However, looking at the way the system has operated and its socio-spatial pattern of repression, it can be argued that planning serves two principal interests: the state and capital. Classic Marxist theory would argue that the former is a reflection of the latter. Unsurprisingly, it has been observed that even in Africa, 'planning and planners generally serve elite and middle class interests' (Simon 1992, p. 47). As part of the 'superstructure' of society, planning serves the interests of power and capital by propping up the capitalist mode of production and its view of order (see Scott 1980).

3. Planning and Elite Interests in Harare

Zimbabwe's planning system is well-known for religiously upholding technical rules, with planners consistently doing things 'by the book' (Kamete, 2008). Despite transformations in the socio-economic and political context, the single-minded crafting, imposition and defence of order through development planning, development control and planning enforcement has remained the primary foci of the country's planning system.

This section reveals how the planning system is implicated in the projects, visions and ambitions of the elite. A planner described this as being 'programmed to serve [...] destined to advance interests of politicians and tycoons' (Interview 2), while an academic termed it 'a propensity to be abused and [to] self-abuse' (Interview 4). I will evaluate these assertions by considering evidence from three cases. The section is based on an assessment of published material including official and scholarly publications as well as the mass media. I also interviewed five planners, a local government expert, and one member of a Harare City Council committee. Obviously, some of the media and official reports have some biases. I have tried not to reproduce these. This is not a legal treatise; nor is it a commentary on politics or corruption. The point is not to apportion impropriety or guilt, but to dissect planning practice vis-à-vis elite interests.

3.1 Promoting Elitist Visions of Order and Modernity

From pre-independence times, the elite have a vision of urban modernity that they have unrelentingly tried to realise (Kamete, 2010). It is a vision shared by many elites in sub-Saharan Africa (Swilling *et al.*, 2003). A closer analysis of elite utterances and actions reveals that the modern city is an orderly city: a city free of 'pre-modern' or 'anti-modern' activities such as ambulant vending, street trading and squatting. Significantly, a modern city is a city free of 'filth', here taken to mean anything that is out of place in planned urban spaces (GoZ, 2005; Douglas, 1966; Cresswell, 1996). With its 'primitive business practices and flouting of regulations' (Interview 1), informality is no part of this elitist vision. It is a threat to urban modernity.

The elite have always considered informality an obstacle to urban order and modernity. When she announced the launching of 'Operation Murambatsvina/Restore' Order (OM/RO) in 2005, the state-appointed chairperson of the Harare City Commission, lamented that Harare had 'lost its glow', ominously adding that 'we [read the elite] are determined to bring it back' (City of Harare, 2005). The foreign affairs minister ardently endorsed the modernist agenda when he told diplomats that OM/RO was launched 'in order to establish an environment conducive to investment' (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2005). Needless to say, the said investment is foreign investment: an important manifestation of modernity and growth and, most importantly, a vital antidote to the unregulated, pre-modern informal sector. This was all but confirmed when, on several occasions the authorities explained that they sought to return Harare to its former status as the 'Sunshine City'. They repeatedly argued that, as the principal port of entry and capital, Harare was crucial in projecting a good image to visitors (Kamete and Lindell, 2010).

The planning system is implicated in the crafting, realisation and defence of this vision (Kamete, 2013). It is the preferred vehicle and weapon of choice. Planning's obsession with urban order is thus an embodiment of elite aspirations. This is seen in the making of Zimbabwe's famously rigid, legalistic and technicistic development plans, the policy documents that determine the spatial development and growth of the cities by specifying what is acceptable and permitted in specific locations (Kamete, 2006). These serve as the basis of development control where anyone intending to carry out development on land under the jurisdiction of the city has to apply for planning permission from the city council which is the legally designated local planning authority.

A look at the Harare Combination Master Plan, and the many local development plans that have been finalised shows that planning sticks faithfully to the modernist vision of the orderly city. The informal sector is excluded from the planning process. Little wonder that it is not catered for in the exclusionary urban spaces produced by the planning system (Kamete, 2006). It is in the enforcement of planning regulations that planning zealously

safeguards the elitist vision and its exclusivist conception of order. Not only are informality, the urban poor, and other 'filth' excluded from the plans, they are also actively suppressed in planning enforcement. Here the planning system has the power to authorise evictions, detentions, demolitions, and relocations. Interestingly, demonstrating that the elite approve of planning's methods of imposing and defending order, planning has repeatedly demonstrated that it can readily mobilise the state's repressive apparatus. Hence, in the frequent clean-up campaigns, law-enforcement and state security agencies, the military and sometimes party militia, are routinely roped in to 'cleanse' spaces contaminated by 'filth' (Kamete, 2008).

It is in this context that all the major clean-up operations should be viewed. And there have been quite a few. In 1983 there was Operation *Chinyavada* [Scorpion] when the police and army rounded up 'prostitutes'—a term that encompassed any unaccompanied woman walking in the city at night—and detained them at prisons before forcibly transporting them to *minda mirefu* [resettlement areas] (Rupiya, 2005). Another huge clean-up campaign took place in 1991 on the eve of the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) scheduled to take place in the country. Spurred on by the desire to ensure that visiting dignitaries did not see the 'un-modern' side of Harare and its surroundings—the Queen would be visiting Mbare, the quintessential high-density suburb—the authorities launched a crackdown, removing, among other 'filth', vendors, vagrants, street children and squatters. These were placed in 'holding camps' out of sight of any visitors who might see them and question Harare's credentials as a modern city.

The most famous cleansing operation is, of course, OM/RO that, for some months eradicated 'filth' from all urban centres. It is instructive that planning was the lead agency in articulating the techno-legal rationalisation of the operation (Kamete, 2007). Significantly, out of all the infractions, the state chose to amplify planning violations which, in its reasoning, precipitated a whole litany of crimes and vices. The voices of senior planners merged with those of the elite, justifying the removal of the filth—famously described as 'a mass of crawling maggots' by the head of the national police force (The Herald, 16 June, 2005)—in the language of law, health and order: all of them cherished ideals in planning.

3.2 Facilitating Primitive Accumulation

Planning has been accused of aiding and abetting what amounts to primitive accumulation by the elite. In Harare, the planning system, using its position, mandate and technical expertise, has enabled members of the elite to acquire vast swathes of land and property and to erect buildings where it is not legally permitted (Kamete, 2012). Whereas, admittedly, in some cases this has bordered on corruption, in others it is an outcome not of corruption, but of the pro-elite biases built into the planning system. The following cases illustrate this.

In 2010 Harare's Special Investigations Committee noted that town planning and land valuation, both under the purview of the Department of Urban Planning Services (DUPS), 'lack accountability and [are] prone to abuse by officials, unscrupulous business people and cunning politicians' (City of Harare, 2010, p. 3). DUPS's influence derives from its position as the 'gatekeeper and rationer' (Interview 6) of a most valuable resource: land. As observed by the committee, 'all applications for leased properties go to them and it is that same department that chooses which applicant wins amongst other applicants' (City of Harare, 2010). The report contains a litany of land swaps, change of use and land sales that demonstrate in graphic detail, the extent of the alleged plundering of land by the political and economic elite.

In one such transaction, the committee reports that a company owned by a well-connected businessman managed to swap 17.6 ha of land in Derbyshire in a relatively 'cheap' part of the city with an equivalent amount of land in Gunhill, one of the most expensive suburbs in the country. Thus 'by the stroke of a pen', the value of the businessman's investment dramatically increased 'without [him] doing anything or taking any risk' (Interview 3). Puzzlingly, the original council resolution was that the businessman would get 10.23 ha 'but on implementation ... the company was given 17.6 ha contrary to the resolution of Council' (City of Harare, 2010, p. 7). The same businessman was also reported to have benefitted from numerous similar deals from the ruling-party-controlled caretaker council in what was described as a 'scam between ... [the businessman] and council officials' (page 14).

Politicians also benefited from the land deals. The Minister of Local Government and Urban Development managed to get himself allocated 20 hectares of prime land in an affluent part of the city for a paltry \$2,300. The same report sensationally revealed that the minister had 'multiple property ownership' (page 8). The report observed,

Contrary to Council policy that an individual must not get more than one residential property from the Council, the Minister acquired vast tracts of land within Greater Harare and registered them in companies associated with him (City of Harare, 2010, p. 8-9).

The 'scams' had a clear sequence of events. The minister would identify a piece of land that he had an interest in and inform council. Planning, being the responsible agency, would 'wield its mandate to nicodemously [that is, secretly] change the use of the land to what was required by the VIP applicant' (Interview 3). The minister would then 'buy the land for a song' (Interview 6).

The two were not the only beneficiaries. According to a report, the elite in Harare and other cities 'looted hundreds of millions of dollars in public funds, land and other assets in an unprecedented orgy of self-enrichment over the past decade' (ZimOnline, 2011). It was estimated that the amount fleeced from Harare City Council (HCC) 'in shady land deals and contracts during the tenure of illegal commissions' amounted to US\$100 million (ZimOnline, 2011). Identifying the elites involved in the massive scams, the report pointed out that

‘influential politicians linked to ... ZANU-PF ... were beneficiaries of choice housing and industrial stands, which they paid very little for or nothing’ (ZimOnline, 2011).

Another instance of authorised primitive accumulation relates to the construction of a luxury hotel on ecologically sensitive wetlands. At the time of writing, the five-star hotel was being constructed ‘by a Chinese consortium² at a rapid rate, despite major objections by local residents, environmentalists and other interested parties’ (Environment Africa, 2011). The Environmental Management Agency (EMA), the state’s environmental watchdog, put up a legal fight to halt construction, saying a proper Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) had not been carried out prior to starting the development and was only submitted once construction was under way. When the issue attracted controversy, the local planning authority, HCC—now no longer controlled by ZANU-PF—reiterated that no developments are allowed to take place on wetlands and recommended that urgent measures be taken to stop the development. But construction work did not stop.

Interestingly, the head of the Zimbabwe Tourism Authority—himself a political appointee and staunch ZANU-PF loyalist—who has no planning remit, arrogantly declared that ‘frogs’ would not stop the US\$300 million investment (Makova, 2012). Brushing aside complaints about the project, his boss, the Minister of Tourism and Hospitality Industry defiantly stated, ‘It’s a contentious issue for other people to worry about locusts and lizards. Since when did locusts and lizards take precedence over a country’s development?’ (Tahungai, 2012).

Apparently the project was orchestrated by the power elite in central government. In accordance with planning and related legislation, central government acquired the land from council claiming it was ‘in the national interest’. According to the HCC, other than invoking the ‘national interest’, central government did not state their intention for the use of the land when they acquired it. As it turned out, the ‘national interest’ was the Chinese-built luxury hotel. When the local authority realised that it had been duped, it called for the reversal of the decision. Protected by the elite, the Chinese investor continued building. To be sure the investor did retrospectively submit an EIA when ordered to do so by the EMA. But, in blatant violation of regulations, and cheered on by the power elite, construction continued despite orders from the EMA to halt construction until the approval of the EIA. Little wonder that whereas the state inexplicably appealed to the national interest, critics saw ‘greed, abuse of power and manipulation in pursuit of primitive accumulation’ (Interview 3).

² The state-appointed Chief Executive of the Zimbabwe Tourism Authority all but admitted the involvement of the power elite in the controversial project when he complained, ‘The Chinese are close to ZANU-PF and some people are not happy with that’ (Makova, 2012).

3.3 Defending Elite Interests

The planning system has also been used to defend elite economic interests. In this regard, the elite have used the planning system to defend their interests from rivalry by non-elite interests. The planning system ensures that the viability and profitability of elite businesses is not disadvantaged by unfair competition. It removes or neutralises threats and inconveniences that might disrupt the day-to-day operations of elite businesses. In urban Zimbabwe, these threats come from one source: the informal sector. The endless and often-violent urban 'clean-up' operations epitomised by OM/RO are often rationalised in the language of protecting legal businesses and law-abiding urbanites from parasitic ambulant informal traders and non-taxpaying informal businesses. The main techno-legal argument is typically rooted in the logic of modernist planning, which, as shown above, is obsessed with order—a function which necessarily entails stamping out disorder (Hughes, 2002, p. 571). In the stifling of spatial transgression, planning consistently stands on the side of the elitist conception of order and orderliness which can be summarised as the protection of property rights and the use of land for purposes prescribed in the operative plan as shown in the zoning ordinances (Kamete, 2008).

The OM/RO case also suggests the protection of legal (elite) businesses from the harm generated by the informal sector through the rapid expansion of a damaging parallel market. The parallel market was the main scapegoat in the country's economic meltdown (Kamete, 2009b). Tellingly, one of the oft-cited reasons for OM/RO was an economic one. A day before the operation was launched in Harare, the Governor of the Reserve Bank of Zimbabwe (RBZ), the architect of numerous futile elitist economic 'turnaround' programmes singled out the 'parallel market' as being behind the RBZ's failure to halt the economic meltdown (Gono, 2005). By then the government had developed the habit of routinely blaming the parallel market for economic sabotage, through among other crimes, siphoning off foreign currency in violation of the regulated official exchange market. The parallel market was also the conduit for many basic commodities that had disappeared from shops, thanks to government's strict price-controls. Since the persistent shortages of foreign currency and basic commodities were portrayed as symptomatic of Zimbabwe's economic crisis (IMF, 2005, p. 4), the blaming of the informal sector as the chief culprit was not an insignificant omen.

In his 2005 Post-Election Monetary Policy Statement, the RBZ boss ominously warned, 'We cannot, and will NOT, allow any shadow forces to interfere with, or derail our [read 'the elitist'] turnaround programme, which we [read 'the elite'] are putting back on the rails with immediate effect' (Gono, 2005, p. 18; emphasis in original). Admitting that there would 'always be unscrupulous elements in every society', the governor warned that the government would 'not allow these elements to dominate our sphere, sabotage our turnaround and derail what has already been an extremely difficult journey' (Gono, 2005, p. 59). The link between the governor's speech and OM/RO is much more than chronological.

Explicitly threatening to deal with 'the illegal 'parallel' market for foreign currency [that] has surfaced again,' the governor indicated that 'measures are being put in place to curb the activities of this market *decisively*' (Gono, 2005, p. 59; his emphasis). Not surprisingly, despite the governor's protestations to the contrary, many critics insist that the 'clean-up' campaign – which was articulated and justified in terms of planning – was an integral part of the promised 'decisive' measures (Tibaijuka, 2005, p. 12, 87; Kamete, 2009a) to protect elite interests.

The foregoing analysis suggests that protecting elite interest was the major motivation for OM/RO. The national economy (read elite economic interests) was being threatened by a predatory informal sector that seemed to have aligned with the criminal underworld in not only precipitating the economic meltdown, but also in perpetuating it. It is logical then to conclude that the operation was motivated, at least in part, by the desire to protect elite interests.

4. On the Obsequiousness of Planning to Elite Interests

It is inevitable that urban planning finds itself at the centre of elite intrigues. In developing economies like Zimbabwe, it is in space and place – matters which are at the very heart of planning – that some key interests of the power and economic elite emerge and converge. It is therefore through planning that these interests are advanced, mediated, reconciled, and defended. Useful insights can be gleaned from the preceding discussion. They revolve around the nature of the elite, the role of bureaucrats vis-à-vis elite interests, and the capacity of elites to manipulate or override bureaucracies to further their interests.

The types of elite in urban Zimbabwe correspond to Machiavelli's 'foxes' (Machiavelli, 1997, p. 67) and Pareto's Class I residue types (Pareto, 1935). As noted above, the foxes among whom Class I residues predominate are imaginative, innovative, and unscrupulous. They cunningly manipulate the public bureaucracy to achieve their goals. They exploit the loopholes in a system that already favours them. They can also count on the naivety of planners who, as 'means technicians' (Friedmann, 1973; 1987) do not question the elite designs beyond 'technical feasibility and adherence to statutes, regulations and directives' (Interview 3), believing that they are neutral and work for the public good. This symptomises the absence of critical reflection-in-practice on the part of the technocrats (see Schön, 1991): a weakness that the 'foxes' can always count on to work in their favour.

In defending their interests, the elite resemble Machiavelli's 'lions' (Machiavelli, 1997), corresponding to Pareto's Class II residue types. The lions among whom conservative residues of Class II preponderate, are capable of decisive and forceful action. However, in Zimbabwe, when the lion or Class II residue traits dominate, what is manifested is more of ferocity than courage. This is evident when the elite tenaciously defend their interests

against the incursions of the 'wolves', here represented by informals and the urban poor. As Machiavelli (1997, p. 67) advises, it is necessary to 'be a fox to know the traps and snares; and a lion to be able to frighten the wolves'. In their (ab)use of planning, Zimbabwe's power elite have heeded this advice really well.

In contrast, the technocrats have turned a deaf ear to this advice. They are neither lions nor foxes. Notwithstanding the lingering suspicions of corruption and other alleged nefarious practices, it can be argued that technocratic bureaucracies are designed to serve the elite even against the leanings of the incumbents. This is especially the case in authoritarian political systems such as Zimbabwe. In this case 'any appeal to the rule of law is pointless' (Interview 7). As shown in Zimbabwe and apartheid South Africa, the power elite can craft laws that serve their interests and amend or repeal those that do not. Unsurprisingly, by adhering to such edicts, bureaucracies that lean towards instrumental rationalism and the rule of law will inexorably serve elite interests. Hence, planners have shown that they are not foxes in that they cannot 'escape the traps laid for [them]' and that they are not lions because they 'cannot defend ... [themselves] against the wolves' (Machiavelli, 1997, p. 67). In this case, the traps are the statutory and regulatory frameworks which are open to manipulation by the elite; the wolves are the elite at their most rapacious and ferocious.

As 'rational bureaucrats [who] cling to the prescribed division of labour' (interview 6), planners believe their 'professional role is to design means to ends based on rigorous analyses of available data' (Interview 7). The goals they seek to achieve are set by the political arm of the state with the 'professional role' being restricted to implementation. It is little wonder that such professionals do not consider it their business to question, let alone adjust, the goals made by their political masters. That would be overstepping their delegated authority. So, the seemingly sheepish advancement of elite interests by the planning system should be seen as an expression of the prevailing logic of a technocratic bureaucracy whose incumbents consider themselves value-free means technicians (Friedmann, 1987) who deal with 'factual data but [avoid] the value questions of defining ... objectives' (Klosterman, 1978, p. 41).

Critics have been quick to read 'corruption' or 'nefarious machinations and outright criminality' (interview 4) into anything that seems to favour elite interests, especially where it appears to disregard statutory and/or regulatory provisions (see City of Harare, 2010). Accordingly, the land swaps and the hotel on wetlands are brandished as proof of 'corruption' and 'criminality'. However, the situation is not that clear-cut. Sometimes such seemingly nefarious deeds are perfectly legal. The problem with latching onto legalities is that it deflects attention away from problematic and even defective legislation and policy. Time and resources are then wasted on pointless debates on whether particular actions conform to 'these defective instruments designed by the rich and powerful, with the rich and powerful, for the rich and powerful' (Interview 4). This of course favours elite interests. For example, the then meddlesome local government minister was notorious for doggedly

persecuting opposition-controlled councils and installing ZANU-PF apparatchiks in the form of caretaker councils. As discussed above, he is also infamous for accumulating multiple properties in Harare and other urban centres. Both these perceived misdeeds are more complex than the simplistic picture of corruption presented by critics and the media (City of Harare, 2010).

In the case of the suspension of opposition councils and the installation of party elites who wind up using the planning system to champion elite interests, the minister is legally empowered to do this. Legislation specifically empowers the president and minister to suspend a mayor if that mayor 'has been guilty of any conduct that renders him unsuitable as mayor' (*Urban Councils Act*, 1995, s 54). The Act gives the minister the power to suspend councillors and appoint commissions to serve as caretaker councils to run the affected councils. In view of this, what should be the subject of debate is not the act of suspension and appointment, but the alleged guilt of the mayor and council as well as the credentials and capabilities of new appointees. Similarly, in the matter of directives that favour elite interests, the Act empowers the minister to 'impunitively [*sic*] meddle in council affairs' (Interview 1). Section 313 stipulates that the minister 'may give directions on matters of policy' and requires the affected council to 'with all due expedition, comply with any direction given to it'. Again the question should not be that the minister is meddling. Rather it should be on the basis for his contentious directives. The point is that the statutory and regulatory framework governing public institutions and bureaucracies have built-in biases that favour elite interest. Technician and legalistically inclined institutions and bureaucracies, such as Zimbabwe's planning system, tend to intensify and perpetuate these biases.

Should we be surprised that the governing elite have a proclivity for stuffing public institutions and bureaucracies with their loyalists, party apparatchiks and protégés? No. This is normal practice even in mature democracies. One can only expect this to be amplified in authoritarian governance systems. So, the question here is neither on the act of appointing or facilitating the appointment of these minions nor the motives of the elite. We know the elite are empowered to do it and they do it for selfish reasons. So as argued above, focus should be on the capabilities of the appointees. When it comes to urban Zimbabwe, it can be said the appointing are of 'varying and mixed abilities [*sic*]' (Interview 5). Some of these are 'well-qualified and perform their technocratic duties reasonably well within the existing framework' (Interview 5). This certainly applies 'to a good proportion of the senior planners' (Interview 4).

This of course cannot be said of the accusations of corruption by the committee that unearthed the land and property scams. This would require a more scrupulous analysis which is beyond the scope of this chapter. Be that as it may, the point here is not that the planners are incapable and corrupt simply because they seem to consistently promote elite interests. While agency is important, the structural constraints and built-in pro-elite biases in the system should be acknowledged as a major determinant in the practices of these

professionals and in the outcomes of such practices. These structural constraints are accentuated in the case of Zimbabwe, because of 'the unquestioning, *unreflective* technocrats' (Interview 6; my emphasis) dedicated to their role as means technicians and who avoid the ethical issues about goals and objectives (Lo Piccolo and Thomas, 2008).

Self-interest and self-preservation are also involved. Mosca (1939) emphasises the important functions within society of the middle classes which he came to regard as the lower stratum of the political elite. As bureaucrats, planners belong to this stratum. Their fortunes are tied to the more superior elite, hence their promotion of the interests of the elite in the upper strata 'so that the crumbs continue to fall from the high table' (Interview 3). The operations of 'mid-elite' are vital to the stability of any political and economic system (Ferdinand, 1967); at the same time, the fortunes of the bureaucrats are tied to the stability of the system. The attitudes and actions of planners can therefore be considered 'normal'. In the work of planners, it is only to be expected that there is an element of 'basic self-interest and instinctive self-preservation' (Interview 4) involved. It would 'take extreme gumption and conviction [and] a bit of stupidity to act otherwise' (Interview 7).

5. Conclusion

The relentless political intrigues surrounding the manipulation of planning suggest that the governing elite in Zimbabwe are not lost to the potential of technocratic bureaucrats to serve as their tools, both offensive and defensive. Be that as it may, it is unhelpful to pass hasty judgements of 'rampant corruption' (City of Harare, 2010, p. 3), 'massive impropriety and vice' (interview 3), or even 'pure negligence, incompetence and criminality' (Interview 1). Attention needs to be redirected away from such unproductive lines of enquiry. The same applies to an obsession with questioning elite interference in planning. The productive lines of enquiry are not about the competence and legality of the actions of the elites or their bureaucratic handmaidens. Rather, they should be about how planners navigate the built-in pro-elite biases in the planning system. Not much can be gained from contesting government actions at the techno-legal level. What needs scrutiny is the attitude of, and reflection by, the bureaucrats vis-à-vis their mandate in the light of glaring pro-elite biases. Professionals who consider themselves value-free means-to-an-end technicians (Friedmann, 1973, 1987; Lo Piccolo and Thomas, 2008), will be obsequious to, perpetuate and entrench pro-elite biases.

What is needed, as the planning literature has shown, is reflection-in-practice and the resultant insurgency (Schön, 1991; Sandercock, 1998a). It is when professionals reflect on their work, that they start raising uncomfortable questions which could lead to them considering working for the interests of all. This might lead to insurgency, allowing them to escape the trap of instrumental rationalism and consciously work towards 'irrational goals' that might entail the embracing of values such as democracy, justice and equality. Granted, bureaucracies are designed to serve the elite; but this is no excuse for bureaucrats to

continuously act as though they are helplessly locked in a programme to serve these interests with no way out. Research suggests that there is room for 'reprogramming' through counter-hegemonic planning practices, even in authoritarian post-colonial regimes (Miraftab, 2009; Sandercock, 1998a, 1998b). Critical reflection and reflective practice are necessary for this to happen.

With the increasing 'merging' of power and economic elite in Zimbabwe, it is difficult to see planners disentangling themselves from their association with elite interests in the absence of reflection-in-practice. Without 'a ginormous seismic shift in the way they cogitate about their doings and the goings-on' (Interview 4), planners will continue to unquestioningly serve elite interests. Public bureaucracies may be 'programmed to serve', but with a bit of reflection, planners can tamper with the code, even vandalise it. Unless they become reflective practitioners, planners will continue to be 'shackled to and by elite machinations' (Interview 2). When planners insist on seeing themselves as value-free means technicians, there is little possibility that they can overcome blind obsequiousness to elite interests.

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Interviews

Interview 1: Local government expert, 3 August 2010

Interview 2: Planner, 30 June 2012

Interview 3: City of Harare councillor and committee member, 30 June 2012

Interview 4: Planning academic, 26 June 2012.

Interview 5: Planning officer, 24 June 2012.

Interview 6: Retired local government planner, 26 June 2012.

Interview 7: Senior planner, 20 June 2012.